

SRI LANKA: FLOODS

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The Disaster

As attention focuses on the severe flooding in China and other dramatic events in the world, devastating floods have hit at least four districts in south west Sri Lanka. Preliminary assessments have determined that over 26,700 families (more than 135,000 people) on the island are directly affected by the high waters. In Galle and Kalutara districts 16,000 families have been moved to safer areas. Around 1,000 homes have been completely destroyed and another 2,000 severely damaged. While the death toll is quite low, the affected have immediate health needs. The government has released the following data:

DISTRICT	FAMILIES AFFECTED
Kalutara	5,950
Galle	6,407
Gampaha	550
Colombo	798
TOTAL	26,705

Sri Lanka Red Cross/Federation Action

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) responded quickly with a small supply of stocks on hand — distributing clothing and other supplies. Without warehouse space, the Society is unable to store much and must now procure goods on the local market.

The Department of Social Services asked the SLRCS and local NGOs to provide additional items to supplement the relief actions of the government. Subsequently the Secretary General of the SLRCS met with the Director of Social Services to determine a co-ordinated effort.

The SLRCS has mobilised branch managers and senior officers at headquarters to establish muster rolls and distribute the relief items at specific sites, with assistance of respective district branches and government officials. They will report on both the operational and financial status as per Federation procedures.

The Federation will provide technical support through its Colombo office as part of the on-going developmental work with the SLRCS. This relief operation is the first one requiring Federation

assistance since 1996, and CHF 50,000 has been released from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund to assist the SLRCS in this emergency phase. All items except rubble hall tents can be procured locally.

Over the past 18 months the South Asia Regional Delegation and the Federation Representative for Sri Lanka have been working with the SLRCS to set priorities and do long term strategic planning (in co-operation also with ICRC). The Society has initiated a number of measures to improve its functioning and accountability. Staff have attended training in financial management, disaster preparedness, and community-based first aid. This operation offers an opportunity to put learning into action. For example, following the assessment of the SLRCS financial systems by the South Asia Regional Delegation, British Red Cross provided funds to implement the recommendations and this situation provides a vehicle to pilot some of the improvements

Although an appeal is not planned, contributions to replenish DREF and to allow the Federation to continue its assistance are requested.

Government Action

The authorities have established shelters in public school buildings and temples where the flood victims have been provided with dry rations and bottled drinking water. Thousands of people from rural areas have temporarily been relocated to these more urban settings. Search and rescue operations continue as a number of people have been sighted huddled on rooftops as high water surrounds their homes. As the waters recede, damage assessments will be made and financial support will be given for reconstruction.

Needs

Based upon data obtained from the preliminary assessment of the Department of Social Services, the SLRCS has been asked to provide urgently needed food and medicine that can be quickly distributed to those most in need. The Department will provide safe drinking water to those receiving baby food, and lactating mothers will be provided with calcium rich food.

With the temperatures hovering in the mid-30s C° (100° F), flood-related illnesses are being reported. The government is providing medical care but has requested that fever reduction tablets, in addition to stocks of biscuits, baby food and calcium rich food (worth around CHF30,000) be distributed by SLRCS.

In addition, the SLRCS is without warehouse space but has land available for the erection of a rubble hall if one or two could be delivered to Colombo (in-kind contributions welcome). This would allow staff to prepare stocks for distribution and give them space for storage of goods likely to be needed during the ongoing flood season.

Nearly 3,000 families have lost everything, except the clothes they were wearing when the floods hit. SLRCS proposes to provide 3,000 families with one set of clothes for each adult family member, two for each child, a bed sheet, and a towel.

With 3,000 houses in need of reconstruction or significant repairs, SLRCS would like to provide 1,000 of the families with 10 x 6 foot tin sheets. This will allow them to construct temporary dwellings as they reconstruct their homes with the funds to be made available from the government.

Non-food needs are as follows:

Rubble halls (2)	40,000
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Tin sheets	10,000	46,400
Clothing and bedding packs	3,000	35,000
Transportation, procurement, distribution, admin	12,000	
Federation technical support and monitoring		15,000
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>148,400</i>
<i><u>Total funds required</u></i>		<i><u>178,400</u></i>

The Federation and SLRCS have an opportunity to provide valuable assistance to victims of this serious flooding in south western Sri Lanka. In doing so, this operation provides a vehicle to implement and test some of the lessons learned during the past few years, identifying institutional areas for future focus, and ensuring that those most vulnerable are served by the Movement.

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